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ABSTRACT

Goals for future child care services are discussed in this address. It is stressed that social service agencies should consider the family as a unit in providing flexible child care services. Other goals include: (1) tailoring child care programs to parent development as well as child development, (2) insuring that child care workers are motivated to provide family support, (3) resolving the dilemma of the working mother and her commitment to the maximum development of her child, (4) incorporating volunteer effort more effectively in social services delivery, (5) developing parent education and family life education programs, and (6) developing broadly adaptable guidelines for social service programs instead of "exportable blueprints" (detailed program plans) to meet the needs of diverse communities. The caregiving abilities of parents and child care workers are discussed with reference to the psychosocial theories of Erik Erikson. (BRT)

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CHILD CARE IN 1976: GOALS AND REFLECTIONS

Sally Provence, M.D.

It is clear that in regard to child care advance on many fronts simultaneously is urgently needed. However, I do not know how to define an agenda for action unless it be one that an organization such as this, reflecting many facets of our concerned interest, could agree to pursue in a co-ordinated way.

When I began to think about the assignment I accepted - to talk about new goals - I did not know what to do for I realized that we have some old goals, some longstanding ones that we have not achieved. So I shall mainly speak of goals that are familiar ones - restating and emphasizing those that seem to me of particular urgency in this the bicentennial year of our country.

Some of these goals define attitudes in need of emphasis or change and a change of attitude, of course, involves an internal action in an individual or group member. Some of them are external actions that we undertake singly or in concert with others.

I shall begin by saying that I agree wholeheartedly with Kenneth Keniston's statement about the overriding, basic importance of families having a decent income. He has presented that need convincingly and I can add nothing.

1. We should reconcile our disagreements with one another about whether children or their parents (or other caregivers) should take priority. We must neither polarize ourselves in our efforts

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to improve the quality of life for children and youth nor alienate them from the adults who are their parent figures, caregivers and teachers. One agency or service may be able to concentrate mainly on only one aspect - we are not magicians - but unless children and the adults who care for them are seen as a unit, a system if you will, we will make little progress in improving child care over the long haul.

2. We need to commit ourselves anew to the concept that not only childhood but parenthood involves a developmental process. So, too, does the talent for taking care of children and working with parents. Part of all of this development is cognitive; much of it is social and emotional.

We owe a debt to Erik Erikson for his wisdom, the beauty of his writing and the way in which he has helped us see the psychosocial development of child and adult - the individual in his society and culture.

In one of his essays[1] he says, "While far removed from any measure of mastery over the physical world [the newborn] is endowed with an appearance and with responses which appeal to the attending adults' tenderness and make them wish to attend to his needs... and which in making adults care, stimulate their active caretaking... Defenseless as babies are, they have mothers at their command, families to protect the mothers, societies to support the structure of families and traditions to give a cultural continuity to systems of child care and training. All this is necessary for the human infant to evolve

1. Erikson, E. (1964) Human Strength and the Cycle of Generations in Insight and Responsibility. New York, W. W. Norton

humanly, for his environment must provide that outer continuity which permits the child to develop his capacities in distinct steps and to unify them."

Surely no one disagrees with Erikson on these points and we must ask ourselves anew what can be done for those infants who have no parents to command, for those parents who are not protected and sustained by families, for those families for whom the society and culture are not supportive and often produce unbearable stress?

In regard to <u>childhood as a developmental process</u>, I suspect that the events of the last 15 years in the child development and child care field have brought us all to the point where we can agree that children and youth have developmental needs, characteristics and crises which a caring society should support. Our problem is not so much to gain acceptance for this basic idea, but to translate knowledge into action. We have made and continue to make many efforts in this direction and our failures are not so much in our goals and conscious intent, but in the inadequate way we translate them into services. We begin <u>good</u> programs anchored in knowledge of child and family life and let them die for want of money and of purpose; we allow them to be inferior and inadequate for want of persons prepared and motivated to carry them out and sustain them over the years. Even child development specialists find themselves lined up against one another, not so often because they disagree about the needs of children and parents, but because when money is short and commitment to children is capricious, they may be forced into

the position of choosing one greatly needed program and putting down another equally important one.

I would ask then what are we prepared to do about creating and sustaining environments in which children have a reasonable chance to develop well? We would all prefer it if the programs which begin could be immediately staffed with workers who know how to do the job. Since that is most often not the case, could we agree that such programs be planned so that, at whatever distance from excellence they begin, we would insist upon their improvement over time? That insistence would mean mobilization of money and of persons who would help them improve until they become really good programs for children and families. I want to interpolate here in case you wonder about my position, that day care is here to stay. It is a necessary service. Our energies should go into making it good day care - in whatever form it takes, flexibly available, supportive of children and parents and closely coordinated with other family services.

To honestly approach parenthood as a developmental process means to recognize and act upon at least two things: first, some are better prepared for parenthood than others. It is not difficult for any of us to think immediately of examples of well-prepared and ill-prepared parents. Second, even for parents who are competent, reasonably healthy in mind and body, desirous of children, able to work and earn a decent living, child rearing is not easy. Though there are for most great personal meaning and many satisfactions, no two parents can carry the responsibilities of parenthood, with benefit to themselves and their children, without the supports of a family, however we currently

define it, of neighbors, of the community and in a reasonably benevolent and sustaining society.

Erikson reminds us that biological parenthood needs at least three links with social experience: the mother's or father's past experience of being nurtured, a conception of nurturing - of motherhood or fatherhood - shared with a trustworthy contemporary environment and an enveloping or world image which ties past, present and future into a pattern of sustenance and guidance.

Experiences of various kinds - professional and social - have taught us many times over that it is possible to assist persons in their development as parents whether they are just beginning, whether they are in mid-career, so to speak, or whether they are caring for their children's children. What do we intend to do with this knowledge?

Preparation for parenthood is another dimension. The most influential part of that preparation occurs during the long years of the child's development from infancy on through his experiences in living within his family group, with peers and with others who nurture, teach, and in other ways communicate the personal and cultural values and traditions.

Obviously the quality of those experiences needs to be at least reasonably good. Another aspect of preparation, that of formal educational input is an important supplement, about which we have done something but need to do more. Such education helps the young person to make use of his intellectual abilities and those practice experiences which are a part of most courses to

acquire knowledge about children and about parenthood. Even so he must await the experiences of adulthood and have support for this later developmental period in order to become the parent he wishes to be.

One of the possible outcomes of their life experience and education for parenthood is that young people may choose not to become parents. Are we prepared to support them in that choice? I believe that we should.

Acting upon the developmental point of view means that we support the notion that those who are to provide the services of which we speak must learn and develop also. I do not know whether anyone has ever formally plotted the development of a child care or parent specialist, but I am certain that for most it includes at least several phases.

For those who choose the work, there is first the period of anticipation and immersion, both gratifying and anxiety producing - stimulating, exciting, exhausting. New ideas and experiences are encountered as theory and practice come together. The events of this developmental period could be compared to infancy and childhood when, in Erikson's terms, hope, trust, will, purpose and competence succeed and overlap with one another as learning and experience accrue. If the worker is developing well, hope predominates over despair, though despair is present, trust over mistrust though mistrust intrudes, will and self-restraint over indecisiveness, shame and doubt, purpose and pursuit of goals over inhibition and aimlessness, competence and learning to work over inferiority.

Then there comes the phase when fidelity to one's standards of excellence and seeking a durable set of values predominate. This is a time when discouragement and disillusionment may overtake the worker, when he needs verification from peers and from mentors of the value of his work and, indeed, of his career identity.

Following Erikson's thought about the maturing adult, I suggest that the worker next enters into a period of generativity during which he is not only able to be creative in his own work, but to impart his learning and attitudes to others. New ideas are born which add to knowledge. Some of this knowledge comes from formal research; much more comes from the way in which daily experiences with children, parents and peers stimulate ideas and ignite the searching mind of the worker. The period of generativity, if things go well, merges with the age of wisdom which provides the benefits and perspectives of accumulated knowledge and experiences of years while it still responds to the challenge of the new.

While the perfectibility of the worker just as of child and parent is no doubt an ideal rather than a likelihood, I do believe that given the opportunity to learn, to practice the art, to share the experience with others, many more of us can continue our positive development and achieve a greater measure of effectiveness. So I ask, are we going to increase our efforts to support the development of the worker?

3. We should not accept the idea that in order to provide jobs for those who need them and caregivers for children we should bring them together whether or not the adults in question have ability or interest in child care.

We should not accept those who have little talent for the work. It is not everybody's cup of tea. Can we - without moralizing or psychologizing - seek out and enable the development of those who do have the motivation and personal qualities which will allow them to provide these family supports of which we speak? Do we dare to insist that those whose talents and preferences go in other directions be helped to pursue those, rather than capturing them for human service careers which are unrewarding for them and of little benefit or perhaps even negative for children and families?

4. In respect to the needs of mothers who work from choice and not from financial need, can we, without demanding that they stay home full time for years, help these mothers to believe in their unique importance to their children? Many of those with whom I speak seem unconvinced. Many have great concern for and pride in their children, but little awareness of the importance to the child of their presence and involvement especially in the earliest years. Their concern for their rights as individuals having potential for many kinds of development is understandable and commendable. They argue with a good deal of validity that our society has been shamefully wasteful of its resources - wasteful in not so organizing family support systems as to make it possible for a woman to develop and use all of her capacities - not simply those of homemaker. Regrettably, the more militant voices on the subject of the need for day care, for example, often express no awareness that the kind of care and experience children have in the early years influences the kind of adults they become. Sweeping statements about

parental rights to day care do not come to terms with the issue of who is to care for children. The answer, implied by the failure to deal with this vital issue, is that child care can be turned over to almost anyone who agrees to do it. Experience has taught us and has taught concerned parents even more painfully that many of the people available have minimal capacity to nurture children and provide them with experiences that promote sound development.

We are all aware that many mothers must work because they are the only providers for their children or because they must supplement the family income in order to have even a marginal standard of living. For those many thousands of families, there is no question about the need for child care and other services which support family life. Many of these parents feel sorely torn between the responsibilities of parenthood and the economic reality. When will we begin to make available good care for their children at a price they can afford? When will our system emphasize the benefits of well-paying part time jobs which will permit mothers or fathers to reduce the number of hours they are separated from their children?

Can we, then, take the stand that the development of children is in fact really too important to be turned over to reluctant or inadequate persons whose major need is for a job? Can we take the further stand that the development of parenthood is too important to be neglected, disrupted, ill-supported by the society? Can we, while so doing, also agree that some kind of work in which one can feel self-respecting is of vital importance to almost every adult?

I turn now to several other thoughts about our goals -

6. We have a deplorable record when it comes to co-ordination of services for families. We argue that, since one cannot do it all, it is better to do a few things well. There is merit in that position and of course we will always need some services which are limited in scope and highly specialized. But I am speaking of the widespread chauvinism, the narrow view, the vested interests, the elitism which perpetually interfere with or make impossible the development of comprehensive support systems for families on a broad scale. So I ask, can we renew our efforts to co-ordinate the good services we already have - ? (And there are many.) Are we willing to do this, not just on paper, not just as window dressing when we are looking for support, but out of recognition that many diverse talents are needed to do the job well? Only when we develop and act upon that recognition will we work together with real effectiveness to produce comprehensive care. Some of these areas of co-operation have already been referred to by our other speakers today. I should like especially to give two examples, though there are many more. One is the crucial importance of co-ordinating health services to parents and infants with those services we call by other names. I do not believe, for example, that it is possible to create good mental health services for pre-school children, nor to practice primary prevention or early intervention without combining these or co-ordinating them very closely with good physical health care. Similarly the need for the usual child and

family services to develop working relationships with those concerned with children's rights and the protection of both child and family under the law is recognized increasingly as of vital importance.

7. Then, I think, we must give up our wishful fantasy that there is one "model" or half a dozen models which if replicated a thousand times over would provide for our nation's children and parents what is needed.

I fervently hope that we are through with the exportable blueprint phase of the development of child care services. Do not misunderstand me - what others have done, how they have organized and carried out programs in their communities and states has an undoubted value in providing information and a starting point. But our mass production, assembly line techniques, useful in some areas, will never work for human services. Our country is too diverse, needs and preferences too varied, human beings too complicated for that to work. More helpful than blueprints, as many have recognized, are guidelines, articulation of principles based upon what is known of human development and behavior, and standards of service with examples of how these may be applied in a variety of situations.

Guidelines tend to define, as we all know, the necessary but not sufficient conditions for good care. So our guidelines, too, should, for any one program, always be in the process of being revised upwards toward excellence.

8. I believe that there is not now nor will there ever be enough money to employ all the persons needed to provide the support system families require in order to thrive. So we must ask ourselves how we can create opportunities for people to give of themselves without financial reward? We need these persons - men and women, boys and girls - whom we call volunteers, whom we used to know as neighbors and friends. We often say, with considerable justification - that people should be paid for their work - that otherwise they and others do not value it. However, it was not always thus and does not always have to be so. The volunteer spirit has been one of the major strengths of our country from pioneer days onward. People could not then have survived without the help of one another given through concern for one's neighbor. I believe we can not now survive as a human community without that spirit. Some of the greatest rewards are those that come to us from having meaningful relationships with others, from the self respect of a piece of work well done, from the gratification of being needed. So I ask/are those of us who plan, direct or participate in support systems prepared to create an atmosphere in which people are enabled to give to others of their time and human interest. I may be misunderstood. I do <u>not</u> mean that donated time and effort be used as an excuse for not obtaining the needed paid personnel. I <u>do</u> mean that if we are to develop effective psychological supports to families we need the time, energy, interest, talent and benevolence of those who wish to give them. I would urge <u>as another one of our goals, an intensive effort to increase the effective co-ordination of volunteers and paid staff in our support system</u>, recognizing that this too is no easy task.

In closing I should like to add that to those who care the risk is not so different than to the vulnerable child or parent — that we will not be able to keep hope alive in the face of frustration, that we will not remain purposeful, competent and faithful under stress, that we will not mature into generativity or will lose our creative energy, that wisdom rather than blessing us will be replaced by cynicism or despair. We cannot afford to succumb to that danger.

I want to read to you another quotation from the essay of Erikson mentioned earlier which I believe is especially fitting for this occasion. "Care is a quality essential for psychosocial evolution, for we are the teaching species. Animals, too, instinctively encourage in their young what is ready for release, and, of course, some animals can be taught some tricks and services by man. Only man, however, can and must extend his solicitude over the long, parallel and overlapping childhoods of numerous offspring united in households and communities. As he transmits the rudiments of hope, will, purpose and competence, he imparts meaning to the child's bodily experiences, he conveys a logic much beyond the literal meaning of the words he teaches, and he gradually outlines a particular world image and style of fellowship. Once we have grasped this interlocking of the human life stages, we understand that adult man is so constituted as to need to be needed lest he suffer the mental deformation of self-absorption, in which he becomes his own infant and pet. Parenthood is, for most, the first, and for many, the prime generative encounter yet the perpetuation of mankind challenges the generative ingenuity of workers and thinkers of many kinds.(italics mine) And man needs to teach, not only for the sake of those who need to be taught, and not only for the fulfillment of his identity, but because facts are kept alive by being told, logic by being demonstrated,

truth by being professed. Thus, the teaching passion is not restricted to the teaching profession. Every mature adult knows the satisfaction of explaining what is dear to him and of being understood by a groping mind."

Finally, I ask, can this newly formed organization address the complex task at hand? It, too, I suppose will develop for better or worse. It encompasses, as far as I can tell from the faces and affiliations of those here, those who have hope, trust, purpose, will, competence, fidelity, loyalty, generativity and wisdom. Can it be developed into a mature organization which can be effective in behalf of families - ?

Let us not despair; let us each work at what we know how to do, and let us do some of our work, at least, together.

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